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An Essay

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1856.

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to Diseases.

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To the Faculty of the
Homoeopathic Medical College,
of
Pennsylvania.

by

John H. Alday M.D.

January 25th 1856.

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On

Menstruation and its Diseases.

Respectfully submitted

To the Faculty of the

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January 25th 1855.

By the term Menstruation, is understood that function in the female economy, by which a certain amount of sanguineous fluid is eliminated by the uterus, and discharged from the vagina every month. This discharge from its periodical regularity, is called the menses or catamenia; and the female in whom it so takes place is said to be regular.

This function generally commences at the age of puberty, which in this country is about fourteen or fifteen, and continues till about forty five, when it disappears: to this latter period is often applied the term, "Critical period," "change of life." It is thought and said that the influence of climate promotes or retards the approach of puberty - but recent observations has shown this to be erroneous; the average period being about the same all over the world. It has been shewed by Mr Robertson, that this period is about as early in the cold, as in the tropical regions.

He is of the opinion, that were marriages to take place in England at as juvenile an age, as they do in Hindustan, instances of very early fecundity would be as common in England as they are in that country. This same gentleman believes, that early marriages and early intercourse between the sexes, where found prevailing generally, "are to be attributed, not to any peculiar precocity, but to a moral and political degradation, exhibited in ill laws and customs, the enslavement more or less of women, ignorance of letters, and impure and debasing systems of religion." He has also shown from statistical evidence, that menstruation does not occur more early in the negress than in the white female. Indeed Dr Baigas of Caraccas in a letter to Prof. Meigs of Phil^a affirms that precocious menstruation is more common in the white, than in the coloured. The flux generally returns every twenty eight days, and lasts

from four to six, and the amount discharged varies from four to eight ounces, though about this, there is no certainty, as every woman is a law to herself; what would be a profuse discharge in some, is merely normal in others.

As to its origin - numerous theories have been presented to explain the efficient cause of menstruation. Neither time nor space will permit me to elaborate thereon; let it suffice to notice the most popular view of the subject - and this is "that which looks upon the maturation and escape of ova as the efficient cause". It is said that every twenty eight days a Graafian vesicle rises to the surface of the ovary, and during its development and enlargement puts the tunica albuginea and peritoneal coat upon the stretch, and thus becomes a source of irritation; in consequence of which there is an afflux of blood to the parts (that is to the ovaries, tubes and uterus) which is discharged

into the latter-organs; the vesicle finally ruptures the irritation is removed, and the flow ceases. This theory is supported by some, and denied by others - the latter contend that wa maybe discharged without menstruation, and the reverse, that the maturation of wa is an effect, and not a cause. That the ovaries are concerned seems proved by the fact, that in their absence there is no menstrual flow. The uterus Fallopian tubes and ovaries are all congested during menstruation; the vagina is relaxed and distensible, and the os uteri is soft; pulpy and swollen. All of which conditions disappear when the flow ceases, and the parts return to the normal condition.

Healthy Menstruation

This is the case, when there is no change of any consequence in the general feelings; although there may be an increase of susceptibility of the nervous system. When perfectly healthy

the menstrual fluid does not coagulate, and the stain is very difficult to wash out. It usually returns with great regularity, in a state of health, every twenty eight days, excepting girls who menstruate precociously, and also in those females approaching its final cessation, or the change of life, as this stage is called. The first menstrual flow is generally preceded by languor, lassitude, pain in the back, headache, chilliness &c. which generally disappears when the discharge takes place. The after periods are often unaccompanied by any premonitory or attendant symptoms.

Menstrual Diseases

Under this division of the subject, the nature, cause and treatment of each menstrual disease or derangement will be stated. The treatment may not be fully and extensively delineated, owing to the fact of not wishing to enlarge my *Thesis* beyond the usual limits.

The first disease in connections with this class,
which I shall present is,

Chlorosis,

This complaint generally declares itself in young females about their fourteenth year: although it may appear in females of more advanced life. Its cause - In fact the cause, is the disease itself. It consist in an obstruction of the first menstrual discharge. The most common exciting causes are cold and exposure to dampness; sedentary habits, want of exercise and fresh air; powerful mental emotions; errors in diet; and the too frequent use of acids and stimulating drinks. Its symptoms - Pale, blanched complexion and lips, sometimes with flushes of heat and redness - a depravity of appetite, general languor, both mental and physical weariness, lassitude and debility. emaciation - the lower extremities frequently assume an oedematous appearance - gne-

rally attended with cold in those parts-headache with flatulent distention of the abdomen, particularly after meals and in the evening. bowels irregular; a harsh, harrassing cough, occasionally with expectoration of dark-colored coagulated blood, and hurried respirations frequently declares itself, if the affection has been allowed to proceed unchecked; and to an unexperienced eye the sufferer appears to be on the verge, or even passing through the different stages of a decline, the disease appearing to stand in closer relations to the functions of the stomach and lungs, than to those of the uterus, as indeed it virtually does in the generality of cases. There is in this affection, a discharge from the vagina.

Treatment—The most important remedies, are, "Pulsatilla, which is peculiarly adapted to females of a mild and phlegmatic disposition, disposed to sadness and tears. This is

most efficient; if there be derangement of digestive organs, with shifting pains in the head, coldness of hands and feet often changing to sudden heat-disposition to diarrhoea and leucorrhoea. Sepia is a very valuable remedy in many of the above symptoms, with hysterical anæmies, complexion sallow with dark colored spots, with a yellowish discharge from the vagina, itching in the vagina and redness of the labia. Sulphur, is a most important remedy, especially if there be any constitutional taint.

There are other remedies, which are to be administered according to the symptoms as for instance Bryonia, Graphitis, Calc. Carb., China, Lycopodium, Ferrum and Platinum.

Amenorrhoea

By this is meant the suppression of the menses, or a suspension or temporary cessation of the discharge, after it has been well established. Its cause - the most common

is cold, sudden or powerful emotion - putting
the feet in cold water during the flow. Disease
of the chest and liver, also Rheumatism
and inflammation of the organs concern-
ed. Any of these causes may produce this
difficulty during the menstrual flow, or
just when it is about to appear, or during the
interval. If the menses are suddenly sup-
pressed during the flow, or just as they are
about to appear, especially if cold be the cause,
the symptoms are apt to be much more
violent, than as if the obstructing cause
were applied in the interval. In very
severe cases this affection is attended with
attacks of spasmodic pains in the stomach
and bowels, often with retching or vomit,
headache, flushed face, wild delirium,
convulsions, hysteria, palpitation of the
heart, dyspnoea. This state of things is some-
times followed by fever and local inflammation

As the result of suppression in the intervals,
though the consequences do not arise so sud-
denly, nor are they so formidable, yet in
a few months, an enfeebled state of health
most certainly ensues. Amenorrhoea is
particularly prejudicial to persons, predis-
posed to Pthis Pulmonalis and other serious
diseases. Treatment - in cases the result
of the direct application of cold, attended
with congestion of the head and chest, redness
of the cheeks, sickness, faintness or giddiness
on rising from a recumbent posture, ful-
ness and acceleration of the pulse give
Aconite. If it has been produced by a chill
and the symptoms are in correspondence
with those of the same nature, as detailed
under Chlorosis give Pulsatilla - Sepia
is a very important remedy also Sulphur
if there be any constitutional taint.
If the disease has been produced by fright give

Aconite followed by Opium, Coffea, Lyco, Verat.
In chronic cases, in addition to the above,
give Nat. Mur. Ars. Graphitis & Cinchona.

Menorrhagias

By this is meant a too copious and prolonged menstrual flow. This increase may be either active or passive, the former occurring in plethoric & robust females, the latter in the reverse. Cause - the most common are nervous and vascular excitement, fevers, internal displacements of the uterus and approach of the critical period. This disease may be confounded with hemorrhage arising from Abortion & foreign growths within the uterus.

Treatment - the principal remedies are
Specac. Calc. Carb. Chamomilla - Bell.
China - Kreosotum Aco &c

Dysmenorrhoea

By this is meant a painful or difficult

Menstruation. or as it is sometimes called
a Menstrual colic. The pains in this disease
are of two kinds, i.e. intermitting, expulsive
pains, resembling those of labour, and
the constant aching pains in the loins,
hips and limbs, like those which often
precede menstruation. Cause. it may
be dependent upon a faulty condition of
the system, neuralgia of the womb, or an
inflammatory state of that organ; or it
may depend upon mechanical con-
striction of the cervix. Cold and the
improper treatment of other diseases,
are the most prolific causes of this derange-
ment. Treatment. Almost the same
as enumerated under Menorrhagia
and Chlorosis: but particularly give
Aconiti if there be febrile symptoms.
Bell, if there be violent congestion of the
head, and confusion of sight with bloat-

edness and redness of the face. Coffee if there be great nervous excitement.

Cessation of the Menses.

By this is meant the period usually termed the "change of life," or "critical stage"; this is no more nor less than the decline of the menses. It occurs about the age of forty five. With ladies who have been free livers, this change takes place a little earlier, with others of different habits, a little later.

It sometimes occurs as early as thirty five; and then again it is delayed as late as fifty years of age. When this period is approaching the menses become irregular in time and quantity. Its course may be so gradual and free from constitutional disturbance, that the female passes through it almost imperceptibly to herself, until she realizes that her menses have ceased with all their incidental frailties. But all are not so for-

fortunate; for some females suffer greatly, with affections of the head, nervousness, debility, pain throughout the body - piles often take on a vicarious office - also Pruritus or violent itching of the private parts.

Treatment - a well selected regimen, exercise in the open air - bathing and friction of the skin - attention to the apparel - all tonics and stimulants to be avoided. The most important remedies are Sachsis, Pulsatilla, Scilla and Sulphur.

Leucorrhoea

This disease is usually called the 'whitis'. It consists of a discharge of unhealthy mucus from the private parts; it sometimes is white or nearly colourless and transparent - then again yellow or green - or slightly sanguineous. The amount of constitutional derangement is dependent upon its severity and the nervous suscepti-

bility of the patient: This affection is both acute and chronic. It appears between the age of puberty and the critical period. It may occur after this period. Cause, difficult labours, irregularity of the menses, purgative medicines, irregular and improper living, want of exercise and proper cleanliness. It is attended with pains in the limbs, back &c. dejected spirits, paleness of the face, loss of appetite, nervousness and neuralgia. Treatment - The principal remedies laid down for this disease are as follows - Aconite if the patient have been subject to Rheumatism. Calc. Carb. is an important remedy in females of lymphatic constitution, and who are subject to copious menstruations. Pulsatilla - Sepia not always admissible in pregnancy. also Sulphur - important in obstinate leucorrhoea.